

O'Brien blasts arsenal layoffs

'They can kiss my votes goodbye'

By Robert Estill
Copley News Service

WASHINGTON — Rep. George O'Brien, R-Joliet, warned the Reagan administration Wednesday it can "kiss my votes goodbye" on some controversial issues if plans go through to cut jobs at the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant.

The administration is considering a plan to reduce the Uniroyal workforce at the plant by nearly 40 percent.

Meanwhile, an Army spokesman told Copley News Service on Wednesday that "nothing has been decided finally," and "alarm bells should not go off" about possible layoffs in Joliet.

However, Ralph Miller, manager at the plant here said at midmorning today, "As of now, my orders are to give layoff and termination notices to the employees on Friday."

He said salaried employees were to be terminated as of March 14.

Hourly workers would be laid off March 7.

O'Brien's warning came a day after he learned from an official of Uniroyal Inc., the contractor that maintains the largely mothballed plant on a stand-by basis, of plans to lay off about 115 of its 298 employees by mid-March to comply with a new budget law.

O'Brien said he told administration officials they would not get his votes for aid to the "contra" rebels in Nicaragua and MX missile funding if they persist with plans for personnel cuts.

"If it is status quo at Joliet, they can kiss my votes goodbye with respect to 'contra' aid and things of that sort where they are going to need votes," said O'Brien, a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee.

O'Brien said he sounded the warnings in telephone conversa-

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tions Wednesday with Gen. Richard Kenyon, a congressional aide for the Army, and M.B. Oglesby, the outgoing White House chief of congressional relations.

He said their responses were sympathetic but non-committal.

However, an Army spokesman told Copley News Service, that "absolutely nothing is going to happen" until James Ambrose III, the under-secretary of the Army, has a chance to review the impact of budget cuts.

As a result of the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings deficit reduction law, the Pentagon is making 4.9 percent reductions March 1 in areas not specifically exempted by the law.

O'Brien said the plans are to trim about \$3.8 million, or a cut of about 28 percent, from the costs of the Joliet operation.

He said the cut would mean a reduction of 38 percent of the Uniroyal employees because other categories of the plant's budget "did not get disturbed at all."

"What they have done is taken the savings right out of jobs," O'Brien said. "They could not have picked a more sensitive area in which to penalize the Joliet people."

Other categories escaping cuts are plant protection, utilities, dehumidification, inspections and minimum essential repairs, O'Brien said. If the personnel reduction were held to 4.9 percent, it would mean a loss of about 15 jobs, he added.

"That ain't nice, and we don't like it," O'Brien said. "But it's better than 115 by a ton.... My conclusion, after we have been scratching around here like magpies, is that the top guns did not really know a hell of a lot about what they really were doing with respect to the way they were taking the money out of their particular operation."

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